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WHETHER THOSE THINGS WERE SO

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Act 17:10-12)

The Christians at Berea were diligent in their attention to the gospel. Several aspects of their diligence are worthy of consideration.

Received the word

The first attribute is that they “received the word with all readiness of mind”.

It is easy to reject out of hand anyone who is “not known”, or who is “not highly esteemed in the truth”. Those who profess to be a disciple of the Lord must not forget that God uses many agencies to sanctify His people, as recorded in Hebrews 13:2: “be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares”. Hence one must keep an open mind regarding the times, places and agencies that God might use to bring them greater light; they must not despise another just because the other is not known to them.

However, while being ever ready to be taught of God there is a need to be watchful because there are those who preach false doctrine. Paul counselled the elders of the church at Ephesus: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

Paul warned that the threat would not come from “outsiders” only but also from those who were “of their own selves”. One temptation which confronts all leaders, and which has the potential to result in them becoming a “grievous wolf”, is the desire for esteem. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees because they had succumbed to that temptation: “And the

Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:14-15).

Paul also denounced the yearning for prominence: “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phil. 2:3).

Paul and Silas warned the Ephesians that one of the tactics of the wolves would be to “draw away disciples after them”; in other words, to cause division among the Lord’s people. The temptation was so strong that Paul also warned the Romans to be aware of it: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18). Christians must watch for any influence

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that tends to cause dissension among God's people: "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" Heb. 12:14-15.

The situation is made yet more complex by the requirement that the Christian be "ready to give an answer to everyone who asks them of the hope within them" (1 Peter 3:15), and so it is that those who are in effect drawing some away after them might be doing so because they believe they have greater light and it is their responsibility to "preach the Word".

Ears to hear

Further the Bereans had ears that heard the message from Paul and Silas. It is God's blessing to have ears to hear, as Jesus told His disciples: "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:15-16). At all times it must be remembered that having ears to hear the treasures of the gospel, is a manifestation of God's grace and is not a result of one's intellect or academic ability: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). It is God who has begun the work; Who has given to anyone "ears to hear" and who gives the increase (1 Cor. 3:6) to all who hear: "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:9-14). The Christian, no matter how knowledgeable they might be, or how much they are sought because they are able to expound the gospel to others, must never forget that they have their knowledge because God has deigned to give it to them: "And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh

and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16:17)

Many teachers

Just as the Bereans heard the word that was preached unto them, so also the Christian today is to learn from their teachers: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:14-15).

However in the 21st century there are many "teachers" of various forms.

One form of teaching is books. There might be a temptation to accept what one reads in a book because a printed and bound book has an air of authority, and one might feel that all things published in a book have been scrutinized and can be relied upon to accurately convey the truth of God's Word. It is a challenge to reject what one might read.

Searched the Scriptures

Another attribute for which the Bereans were commended is that they not only "heard the word" but they did not accept what they heard just because it was Paul or Silas who had told them. On the contrary they "searched the Scriptures daily whether those things were so".

It is possible that searching the Scriptures presents the Christian with a greater challenge today than it did in the apostle's time due to the variety of translations (or "Versions") that have been published.

One factor that might increase the temptation to accept what one reads in one translation is that "modern versions" use language that is more aligned to the language used in general conversation and consequently it is easier to understand. However one should ask themselves the question "why do I prefer that particular translation?"

One danger is that it might not be the language used but that the understanding that may be drawn from it is more palatable, is more in line with what one would like to think.

Another temptation that might confront the student is to use one particular translation for a particular verse (because one is attracted to the concept conveyed by that translation) but to change to another for a different verse. Today the challenge of "searching the Scriptures" is indeed a challenge.

Many of them believed

The clause “*therefore many of them believed*” (Acts 17:12) implies that they changed from their previous belief and embraced the message Paul and Silas had brought to them. It is easy to instantly dismiss any message which is different from what one currently believes. One must not reject any “new thought” just because it is new; indeed many who now rejoice in the truth of God’s Word were introduced to the message by someone who expounded, either verbally or by the written word, concepts which, at that time, were new to them.

And that is true regarding not only the first inkling of the gospel—the “*milk of the word*” (1 Cor. 3:2)—but to all levels and depths of God’s Word: “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.*” (1 Cor. 3:5-6).

Having said that, it must also be remembered the counsel Paul wrote to Timothy: “*This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men*

shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:1-5). An highminded disposition reflects pride and is contrary to the humility which the Christian is to develop, and Paul exhorted Timothy to turn away from those who have that disposition: “*Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble*” (James 4:5-6)

Indeed, it is by God’s grace, and God’s grace alone, that anyone is able to “*grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*” (2 Pet. 3:18).

May God bless all who strive *to prove all things and to hold fast that which is good*” (1 Thess. 5:21). ■

ENTERING INTO REST

“*Let us therefore fear lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it... Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest lest any man should fall after the example of unbelief*” (Hebrews 4:1, 11)

The promise of rest for the Christian will reach its ultimate fulfilment when they are resurrected in the first resurrection; after that time they will not be liable to death: “*Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power...*” (Rev. 20:6). Their immortality will be their reward for their devotion to the Lord during their earthly life: “*And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them*” (Rev. 14:13).

Effort is required in this present life to gain the reward of eternal life at the first resurrection: “*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it*” (Matt. 7:12-14). The first part of Jesus’ exhortation—to do unto others as ye would have them do unto you—requires conscious effort, as Paul

wrote in his letter to the Ephesians: “*That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph. 4:22-24).

In Hebrews 12, “putting off the old man” and “putting on the new” is compared to a race. “*Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds*” (Heb. 12:1-3). Weariness ensues the expenditure of effort.

Rest in the present life

However there is a rest that the Christian enjoys during their present earthly life. It is not a rest from

exertion, nor a rest from the obligations God has given them. On the contrary effort is required to enter into that rest: “*Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest*” (Heb. 4:11). The Christian’s rest during their earthly sojourn is a rest in comparison to the stress that burdened them before Jesus shone into their heart: “*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matt. 11:28-30). The rest is available only to those who commit their welfare into God’s hand: “*Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and trust not to thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths*” (Proverbs 3:5,6). Hence the Christian’s rest is a rest from anxiety and striving to gather earthly riches: “*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal*” (Matt. 6:19-20).

Unbelief

Hebrews 4:11 exhorts all Christians to labour so that they do not “*fall after the same example of unbelief*”. The example is that of the Israelites’ who failed to maintain their trust in God throughout their sojourn in the wilderness after their exodus from slavery in Egypt: “*Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea... But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted... Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come*” (1 Cor. 10:1-11). The Israelites became doubtful of God’s on-going provision for them and sought to return to the material benefits they enjoyed in Egypt: “*And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness*” (Exodus 14:11-12).

The same challenge—maintaining faith that God will continue to care for each one of His people—has confronted the Lord’s people from early days: “*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of*

afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used... and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward” (Heb. 10:32-35). Maintaining the same exuberance and enthusiasm as one experienced when they “*first believed*” is part of the challenge of all those who would continue to enjoy His rest throughout their earthly life.

Joyfully

An essential component of entering into God’s rest in this life is to joyfully comply with His will. Such joy is available only to those who believe “*... that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28). If one has any feeling of resentment regarding the race God has set out for them they will not enjoy the peace (rest) that He provides for them. In this regard, Jesus is our ultimate example: “*Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart*” (Psa. 40:7-8). The reminder in Hebrews 12 is worthy of repetition: “*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds*” (Heb. 12:2-3). In the words of another, “it is not for us to supervise the trials and difficulties which may beset us. It is for us to make an unreserved consecration of ourselves to the Lord, and then leave to Him the decision of how great shall be our trials, how great our sacrifice in following his leadings”.

God’s witness

Another aspect of being able to rest in God’s providence in this life is the necessity of belief that God—the creator of the universe—has indeed shone in one’s heart: “*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul used the witness of the Holy Spirit dwelling in each one to assure the Christians at Rome: “*The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified*” (Rom. 8:16-17). God, who began His work in each one, *will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil. 1:6).■

ISRAEL : IN GOD'S TIME

"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the Kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6)

During the last 10 years or so, the events in Israel indicate that the time has come for God to start returning His favour to them: *"For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes"* (Rom. 11:25-28).

There are several components of the Apostle Paul's statement that are worthy of note:

- Disregarding the events relating to Israel constitutes wisdom in one's own conceits;
- Blindness in part has happened to fleshly Israel;
- Israel's blindness will be removed when the fullness of the Gentiles has come in;
- The Deliverer will turn away ungodliness from Jacob;
- Turning away their ungodliness is one of God's covenants with Israel.

To those points may be added:

- God's covenants are irrevocable (Gal. 3:13-17);
- God will honour His covenants regardless of the Israel's disobedience: *"For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant. Nevertheless I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth, and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant"* (Eze. 16:59-60);
- Another of God's covenants with Israel is that He will bring them back to the land He gave to Jacob: *"And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their*

God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the LORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore" (Eze. 37:24-28).

- When God brings Israel back to their homeland He will make Himself known to them, and the period of their isolation from God will be an example to the other nations: *"So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward. And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions have I done unto them, and hid my face from them. Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; After that they have borne their shame, and all their trespasses whereby they have trespassed against me, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid. When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations; Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD"* (Eze. 39:21-29).

World War 1

During World War I, the Balfour Declaration expressed the intention of the British Government to create a Jewish State: *"His Majesty's government views with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object"*. Nevertheless it is doubtful the British Government realized that it would be another 29 years before the State of Israel would be declared (1948), and a further 19 years until Jerusalem was brought back under Israeli control (1967).

It is now 102 years since the beginning of World War 1. The passing of more than 100 years has the potential to cause many to wonder whether God's kingdom will ever be established. It is becoming a

test of faith to believe that the promises of God respecting Israel will be fulfilled. That test is greatly nullified by remembering that all of God's promises will be fulfilled **but in His time**—His appointed time—and not mankind's time: *"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"* (Hab. 2:3).

1967 Six Day War

In recent times there have been reports by several Israeli news agencies—Israel Broadcast Authority, JerusalemOnLine, Arutz Sheva, and BreakingIsraelNews—that some Israeli commentators attribute Israel's victory in the Six Day War to God ("Hashem"). One such report reads: **Who Conquered Jerusalem in 1967: God or Man?** (By Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz, June 5, 2016, (<http://www.breakingisraelnews.com/69157>)): *"Thus saith Hashem: I return unto Tzion and will dwell in the midst of Yerushalayim; and Yerushalayim shall be called the city of truth; and the mountain of Hashem of hosts the holy mountain."* Zechariah 8:3 (*The Israel Bible™*). *The 1967 Six Day War is usually described as a series of swift and daring battles that decisively saved Israel from an overwhelming enemy, but some historians claim that the incredible victory in Jerusalem... was won almost by accident, against the expressed desire of the Israeli high command. Others see the unlikely victory as coming from a higher authority, as the clearest expression of the will of God... (and) attribute the victory to a higher authority than the dictates of history".*

Commander Rafael "Raful" Eytan, who led the paratroopers of the 35th Brigade into the holy city, was not a religious man, but even he was affected by the event. "Apparently someone in heaven was watching over us".

Rabbi Dov Begon, head of Yeshiva Machon Meir, was a foot soldier during the battle for Jerusalem in 1967. He described his experience to Breaking Israel News: "It was clearly a case of divine will, hitoruta d'la'ila (awakening from above). The entire war came at us against our will, but the battle for Jerusalem even more so. Everyone who fought in the war saw this. After 2,000 years of longing, it took three days. Before we knew it, we were on the Temple Mount, feeling like we were dreaming." "When Hashem brought back those that returned to Tzion, we were like unto them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing; then said they among the nations: 'Hashem hath done great things with these' (Psa. 126:1-2)".

From 1970 onwards

Perhaps one of God's greatest secrets is His dealing

with Israel since 1967. While the nations have expended much effort trying to find a peaceful solution to "the mid-East problem"—various partition plans, Oslo Accords, Two State Solutions, and contests arising from the concept of "occupied territories"—the governments seem to be largely oblivious to the recent technological and humanitarian developments in Israel.

Additionally it is not only the secular governments who are unaware of the events, but the religious world also, including those religions whose faith and preaching is ostensibly based on the Bible, is oblivious to recent events in Israel and their relation to Bible prophecy.

Their ignorance may be excused to some extent because, in terms of area, Israel is the 100th smallest country, and as at March 2015, comprised less than 1/1000th of the world's population. However those proportions make Israel's accomplishments all the more remarkable.

On 12 September 2015 (27 Kislev, 5776), a combination of data sources, including *"The Jerusalem Post"* (<http://www.jpost.com/>), published the following data:

- the Middle East has been growing date palms for centuries. The average tree is about 18-20 feet tall (6 metres) and yields about 38 pounds (17 kg.) of dates a year. However Israeli date trees are now yielding 400 pounds/year (182 kg/year) and are short enough to be harvested from the ground or a short ladder;
- Israel's \$100 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbors combined;
- Per capita, Israel has the highest percentage of home computers in the world;
- Israel has the highest ratio of university degrees to the population in the world, producing more scientific papers per capita than any other nation (109 per 10,000 people);
- The per capita income in Israel in 2000 AD was more than 17,500 USD, exceeding that of the UK;
- 24% of Israel's workforce hold university degrees, which is third in the industrialized world (after U.S.A. and Holland);
- Israel is the only country in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain in its number of trees, made more remarkable because this was achieved in an area considered mainly to be desert;
- Israeli scientists developed the first fully computerized, no-radiation, diagnostic instrumentation for breast cancer.
- An Israeli company developed a computerized system for ensuring proper administration of medications, thus removing human error from medical treatment (7,000 patients die from treatment

mistakes every year in U.S.A. hospitals);

- An Israeli company developed the first ingestible video camera, so small it fits inside a pill, and is used to view the small intestine from the inside, detecting cancer and digestive disorders;
- In Israel 145 per 10,000 of the workforce are scientists and technicians, compared to 85 in U.S.A, 70 in Japan, and less than 60 in Germany;
- Israel absorbs one of the largest immigrant quotas per capita in the world: between 1984 and 1991, Israel airlifted a total of 22,000 “Jews at Risk” in Ethiopia to safety in Israel;
- In 2015 Israel absorbed 28,000 immigrants, including 8,000 from France. With a population of 8,300,000, that constitutes 0.3% of the population. This rate of immigration reflects Israel’s policy: the head of the Knesset’s Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs Committee, declared that *“Israel must be prepared to absorb Jews who come from France or anywhere else in the world in the wake of the ongoing terrorism... France has seen a sharp rise in anti-Semitism in recent years and led countries from which Jews made aliyah (home coming) to Israel in 2014, with almost 7,000 new French immigrants, which was more than double the 3,400 who came last year (2013)”*.

All the above were achieved while engaged in regular wars with an enemy that seeks its destruction, and an economy that has to spend more per capita on its own protection than any other country on earth.

What lies ahead

Many of God’s prophets record God’s future dealing with the fleshly nation of Israel. So numerous are the references that to deny them is almost a denial that the Scriptures are God’s Word.

Jeremiah is one such prophet: *“And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant. Who is the wise man, that may understand this? and who is he to whom the mouth of the LORD hath spoken, that he may declare it, for what the land perisheth and is burned up like a wilderness, that none passeth through? And the LORD saith, Because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, neither walked therein; But have walked after the imagination of their own heart, and after Baalim, which their fathers taught them: Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the heathen, whom neither they nor their fathers have known: and I will send a sword after them, till I have consumed them”* (Jer. 9:11-16). Israel’s dispersion

amongst the nations of the world was a deliberate punishment meted out by God for their previous transgressions and acts of disobedience.

However He has not cast them off forever, but just as He punished them so also will He restore them: *“Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath; and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: And they shall be my people, and I will be their God: And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me. Yea, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with my whole heart and with my whole soul. For thus saith the LORD; Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them”* (Jer. 32:37-42).

Restoration

However their restoration to God’s favour will occur over a period of time. The prophet Ezekiel compares the process to what one may imagine would be the process of restoring human skeletons to life: *“The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD... Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel... Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD... And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD”* (Eze. 37:1-14).

Firstly the “bones”—the whole house of Israel (Verse 11)—come together, then “sinews” are added, followed by “skin” and finally breath is installed and

the Being comes to life. The “reassembled” nation of Israel will receive its breath of life—Ezekiel 37:9—when God establishes His New Covenant with them: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer. 31:31-34).

A channel of blessing

Finally the restored nation of Israel will be a channel through whom God will teach the other nations: “In

those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, we will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech. 8:23).

The prophet Isaiah also testifies that is God’s plan for Israel and that the other nations will come to Israel to learn of God’s will for them: “In the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa. 2:2,3).

The promise is wonderful and the challenge to the Christian today is to have the patience that is necessary to wait for it to be fulfilled, realising that God will fulfill all His promises, both to the world and to all nations, but He will do so in His time.■

THINGS I MUST REMEMBER

The high calling

My election to the high position to which I am called is not yet made sure – the race for the prize of my high calling is still before me. I am yet in the enemy’s country, surrounded by many subtle and powerful foes. If I would be successful I must “*fight the good fight of faith, the weapons of my warfare are not carnal and I wrestle not with flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places*” (Eph. 6:12).

Faith

Without faith I cannot please God, I cannot be justified, I cannot be an overcomer. Faith without works is dead.

Truth

Truth is given to me for its sanctifying effect upon my heart and life. Its precious fruits should be more and more evident from day to day. I must add to my faith true excellence of character that will mark me as separate from the world and its spirit.

Virtue

Virtue stimulates benevolence, which in turn seeks to alleviate suffering, to sympathise with sorrow, to comfort those in distress, to elevate and bless others and to assist all men as I have opportunity. For this I must gain knowledge of God’s character in order that

I may more thoroughly imitate it and more fully conform to His teaching. I must exercise self-control in all things and let my moderation be known unto all men, that is, not hasty, rash or thoughtless.

Patient submission

I must let patience have her perfect work, that I may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. With long-suffering meekness I must earnestly strive to stem the tide of human imperfection and weakness and endeavour to regain divine likeness.

Purity

I need to keep the instructions and principles of the Lord fresh in my mind and drink them frequently every day. By God’s grace I stand as a guide post in the world’s dark day. I must let my pure light shine. “*To the pure all things are pure...*” (Titus 1:15).

Christian growth

I must grow in grace and knowledge; not knowledge only but also in grace. I must try to be more Christlike, more meek and gentle, more disciplined and refined, more temperate in all things and more possessed of the mind that was in Christ Jesus.

Regarding knowledge I must remember that all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, for reproof and for instruction in righteousness that I may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.■

THE SUN

Without the sun there would not be any life on planet Earth: no human, animal or vegetable life. The planet would be black and lifeless. And it is not only the existence of the sun that is critical, its position is also critical. If it were a little closer it would burn up most life forms; if it were a little further away human beings would freeze to death.

Fire

As well as providing the warmth necessary for life, the heat of the sun can start a fire. Fire consumes materials and in that sense it is a means of destruction. It is used in the Scriptures to describe the removal of the present heavens and earth. Zephaniah 1:14-18 reads: *"The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD... Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land"*. The prophecy records that God will remove the evil with "the fire of His jealousy".

The Apostle Peter uses the same symbolic language: *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness"* (2 Pet. 3:10-13). Peter uses a mixture of terms to describe the removal of this present order: heavens departing with a noise, elements melting, earth being burned up, and all being dissolved. Peter comforts his readers by reminding them of the promised "new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness".

Likewise Zephaniah prophesied about the glorious time to follow: *"Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the*

LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent" (Zeph. 3:8-9). After the fire of God's jealousy has removed the dross, God will turn to the people a pure language, the outcome of which will be mankind serving him "with one consent", that is, agreeably, co-operatively.

Light

The sun is the major source of light. Before the invention of modern light sources the only sources of light were the sun and fire.

In the physical world objects can be seen by the natural eye only if they are illuminated, that is, light is coming from them, either from their own luminosity or by reflection from another source.

In the Scriptures "light" is used in both a literal and a symbolic sense. The literal sense relates to the creation of the universe: *"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day"* (Gen. 1:3-5).

One example of light being used in a symbolic sense is Jesus' declaration at His first advent: *"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life"* (John 8:12). The light that Jesus brought into the world illuminated God's purpose for mankind, which purpose had hitherto been shrouded in the dark sayings of prophecy, as Isaiah prophesied: *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"* (Isa. 9:2).

Another example of light being used in a symbolic sense is 2 Corinthians 4:6. Paul wrote: *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"*. Paul describes the enlightenment with which each individual is blessed when they receive the Holy Spirit, and contrasts it with the darkness in which they sojourned previously.

Hebrews 10:32 uses similar terminology: “*But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions*”. The term “illuminated” implies light is impacting on one and contrasts the insight God’s chosen ones now enjoy compared to the darkness in which they had dwelt previously.

Paul also states that it is the light one has received that enables them to understand the times and seasons of God’s plan: “*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness*” (1 Thess. 5:1-5).

Lightning

Another effect of the sun is lightning. Lightning is a source of both heat and light. Lightning is frequently associated with thunderstorms. Thunderstorms form when a moist atmosphere is heated from below to form clouds, which interact with each other and build up static electricity. The electric charge is dissipated as lightning. At the same time, energy is dissipated in the form of thunder.

Thunderstorms are manifestations of God’s power and can invoke fear: “*Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders: thou hast declared thy strength among the people... The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled... The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook*” (Psa. 77:13-18).

Anxiety

Exodus 19:16 records an instance when lightning caused anxiety to the children of Israel: “*And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled*” The Israelites were frightened by the thunder and lightning.

God used lightning to scatter David’s enemies in the days of Saul: “*The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most High uttered his voice. And he sent out Arrows and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them*” (2 Sam. 22:14-15). The arrows and lightning caused them to fear.

Jesus prophesied that a time would come when men would be frightened by the events in the heavens: “*And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*” (Luke 21:25-26). While the prophecy does not specifically mention lightning, the scenario is “*the powers of heaven*” creating fear.

Lightning as a source of light

However lightning is not always associated with thunderstorms and fear. Matthew 24:26-27 reads: “*Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be*”. The prophecy relates to Christ’s second advent but does not include any reference to thunderstorms or fear.

In the New Testament “lightning” is translated from the Greek word “astrape” which Strong’s Concordance (#796) defines simply as “lightning”. “Astrape” occurs nine times, four of which are in Revelation (4:5; 8:5; 11:19 and 16:18). In all four of these instances it is associated with thunder. However thunder is not mentioned in the other five instances: Matthew 24:27, 28:3; Luke 10:18, 11:36 and 17:24.

The lightning mentioned in Matthew 24:27 comes “*out of the east*”. Due to the topography and nature of a particular region some weather systems “frequently” originate in the same area and move in the same direction (for example cyclones normally move from west to east). However no data could be found that indicates that thunderstorms in Israel regularly originate in the east. That fact has led to the surmise that the lightning of Matthew 24:27 refers to something other than lightning, and the sun has been suggested because it always rises in the east. However to interpret “astrape” to mean something other than lightning means the four references to “astrape” in Revelation have to be disregarded.

Luke 17:24 also mentions lightning but does not mention thunder nor the direction from which the lightning comes: “*For as the lightning, that lightneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day*”. The lightning of Luke 17:24 can be seen over a wide area.

Matthew 28:3 describes the angel’s countenance as “like lightning”. There is no mention of thunder, how

widely the angel was seen nor the direction from which it appeared. Perhaps the lesson is brightness.

Another instance of “astrape” is in Luke 10:18: “*And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven*”. “*Falling from heaven*” is consistent with literal lightning; it is difficult to equate it with the sun.

The remaining instance of “astrape” is in Luke 11:36 where it is translated “bright shining”: “*The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light*” (Luke 11:34-36). It is difficult to equate the “*bright shining of a candle*” with the sun or lightning, and so it seems that another lesson is to be learned from Luke 11:36.

The effect of the bright shining of the candle is to effect a change from being full of darkness to being full of light. Such total “occupation” of the individual may be implied to be a form of “wideness”, as in 1 John 1:5-7: “*This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*”.

The importance of being “*full of light*” is consistent with Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesians: “*For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light*” (Eph. 5:8).

Lightning flashes

Lightning occurs as a flash, that is, it is of very short duration, and hence is seen only by those who are watching at that instant. However while it is momentary, lightning is visible over a wide area; “*from one end of heaven to the other*”.

However while the lightning flash is very brief, if it causes a fire—and hence destruction—its effect is prolonged and is visible to all. Nevertheless the cause of the fire is not visible to all.

With the exception of its occurrence in Matthew 28:3—the angel that rolled back the stone—all the prophecies that relate to lightning relate to the second advent of Christ—“*so shall also the Son of man be in his day*”. Hence it is suggested that the symbolism of

lightning in the various contexts is used to convey different aspects of Christ’s coming:

- **Flashes:** The events that trigger the manifestations of His coming are each fleeting and are seen only by those who are constantly watching; the Christian is to be constantly watching;
- **Extent:** Nevertheless to those who are watching and who recognise what they see to be effects of Christ’s coming, the effects are widespread: they are not confined to one particular location: “*And then if any man shall say to you, Lo, here is Christ; or, lo, he is there; believe him not*” (Mark 13:21);
- **Effect:** The effect of His coming is the gradual removal of national supremacy just as a fire gradually consumes its fuel; the nations are in gradual (but also rapid) decline.

Limiting the conclusions that may be drawn from the references to the sun as a source of both heat and light (and ultimately lightning) might seem to be “shallow” and deny some deeper aspects of the prophecies, but it seems to be consistent with all references and substantiated deductions. The time is coming when the whole world will dwell in the light of God’s glory, when all symbolisms will be fulfilled: “*And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it*” (Rev. 21:23-24).■

CONVENTIONS

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The annual convention of the Nambour Bible Class will be held from **23 to 25 September 2016** at:
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Mari Street, Alexandra Headlands, Qld 4572

For enquiries contact:

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* * *

Victoria, Australia

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HIS NAME SHALL BE CALLED: THE EVERLASTING FATHER

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Both of the aspects of the title “Everlasting Father” are significant.

Father

A father is one who begets another: *“Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old”* (Prov. 23:22).

God is the father of Jesus and Jesus is God’s Son: *“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son... For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?”* (Heb. 1:1-5). God confirmed that Jesus was His Son when Jesus was baptized: *“And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:11).

Jesus acknowledged that God was His Father: *“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God”* (John 20:17).

God is our Father

Jesus’ statement that He was going to His Father and our Father reveals that, in the spiritual sense, God is the father of those to whom He has revealed the truth: *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”* (James 1:18).

Likewise Paul distinguished the status of God and Jesus to the Christian: *“Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.”* (1 Tim. 1:2), and again in his letter to the Colossians: *“To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”* (Col. 1:2).

Consequently the expression in Isaiah 9:6 that refers to Jesus as a father is not referring to the spiritual aspect of the believers’ life at this time.

Jesus the Father of the world

In one sense God has given the world to His Son: *“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psa. 2:7-8). The concept is consistent with Jesus giving His life so mankind can have life: *“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world”* (John 6:51). Since Jesus may be regarded as mankind’s life-giver He may be regarded as the Father of mankind.

Mankind receiving life through Jesus is in contrast to them losing life due to Adam’s transgression: *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”* (1 Cor. 15:22).

Everlasting Father

While God has given the heathen to His Son, after Jesus has restored them to life He will give the kingdom back to God: *“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet”* (1 Cor. 15:24-25). Hence it might seem that Jesus will not be mankind’s everlasting father.

However in the physical world the status of father cannot be removed; regardless of what one’s progeny may do, they are one’s children forever. Likewise in the spiritual sense Jesus, as mankind’s life-giver, will be their father forever. The life that Jesus gives them will be eternal; never again will there be a requirement to “salvage” mankind from death: *“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb... And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: . And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever”* (Rev. 22:1-5).■

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